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NATURAL SPONGE INDUSTRY PRESENTS PLAQUE TO INTERIOR DEPARTMENT AGENCY

The Sponge and Chamois Institute and the Tarpon Springs, Florida, Sponge Exchange have presented an engraved plaque to the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Commercial Fisheries for the Bureau's assistance in a recent test sponge marketing project in Harrisburg, Pa.

The plaque, accepted for the Bureau by Director Donald L. McKernan, reads:
"To Bureau of Commercial Fisheries Branch of Marketing with sincere appreciation for the Natural Sponge Marketing Project October 1963, Tarpon Springs Sponge Exchange, and Sponge and Chamois Institute."

The Nation's colorful and historic sponge fishing fleet, based at Tarpon Springs on Florida's Gulf Coast, once supported a thriving sponge industry. The fishery, however, declined in the late 1930's when a blight nearly wiped out the natural sponge beds in the Gulf and Caribbean areas. Natural sponges have since recovered from the disease, but meanwhile, artificial sponges appeared on the market and a new generation of Americans has grown up without really knowing what a natural sponge is or how useful it can be in everyday household and industrial activities.

Some natural sponges are still in great demand. For instance, the "silk sponge," which is used primarily in ladies' cosmetic kits, enjoys a good market.

A test marketing project in Harrisburg confirmed the need for improved merchandising techniques to include more attractive and individual packaging and discovery of new and more varied uses for natural sponges if the Florida natural sponge industry is to regain its former position of prominence.

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